The Handbook of
Narrative and
Psychotherapy

*Practice,
Theory,
and
Research*

Edited by

LYNNE E. ANGUS
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LYNNE E. ANGUS
York University

JOHN McLEOD
University of Abertay Dundee

Part IV

Narrative Assessment Strategies in Psychotherapy

Self-Defining Memories, Narrative Identity, and Psychotherapy

A Conceptual Model, Empirical Investigation, and Case Report

Jefferson A. Singer

Pavel S. Blagov

OVERVIEW

In previous work, we have provided examples of narrative memories generated by clients in the course of psychotherapy that have become organizing touchstones in the therapeutic dialogue and the client's own self-understanding (Singer, 2001, in press; Singer & Blagov, in press; Singer & Salovey, 1993, 1996; Singer & Singer, 1992, 1994). The goal of this chapter is to describe more recent theoretical and empirical advances that locate these "self-defining" memory narratives in an integrative model of identity and autobiographical memory. After reviewing the recent convergence between cognitive perspectives on the self and memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) and narrative approaches to identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999, 2001), this chapter provides empirical support for our model by demonstrating the linkage between self-defining memories and personality adjustment. Finally, we examine this model of memory and personality in psychotherapy by its application to a case example.

THE SELF-MEMORY SYSTEM MODEL

In the early 1980s, a burgeoning new movement in cognitive psychology focused on

autobiographical memory (as documented in several influential books, Neisser, 1982; Neisser & Fivush, 1994; Neisser & Winograd, 1988; Rubin, 1986, 1996). Although this work made significant progress in a cognitive understanding of memory processes, these advances were relatively independent of developments in personality theory and research. However, among these cognitive studies of memory, Martin Conway's model of autobiographical memory (Conway, 1996; Conway & Rubin, 1993) offered the most promise of integration with contemporary personality research. In a comprehensive review article, Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) laid out a cognitive model that located autobiographical memory in a *self-memory system* that integrated personal goals and other components of personality and identity.

The self-memory system enables the individual to retrieve memories of personal significance by reconstructing specific memories from a base of autobiographical knowledge. When a memory cue occurs, it activates goals relevant to the personality, which are organized hierarchically in a "working self." These goals are linked to a three-level hierarchy of autobiographical knowledge. To retrieve a specific memory relevant to the goals activated by the retrieval cue, the individual instantiates a hierarchical search through the autobiographical knowledge base.

At the first level, and the most abstract, individuals generate "lifetime periods" or large units of time from their lives that reflect particular overarching goals and activities, for example, early years of marriage, graduate school, or a period of financial hardship. Once a lifetime period is defined, individuals search through "general events." General events are categories of events linked across relatively brief time periods (a week, a day, a few hours) or organized by a shared theme (e.g., first-time experiences or academic successes). Finally, these two types of semantic information allow individuals to generate *event-specific knowledge*. Event-specific knowledge encompasses imagery and sensory detail tied to unique and specific episodes in an individual's life. The cumulative search process yields the recollection of a specific and sensory-rich autobiographical memory. The activated goals within the working self both guide and limit the search, ensuring that it is relevant to the exigent cue but does not overwhelm attentional resources. Thus, the self-memory system both encourages and limits the search process.

The working self clearly, then, has a central role in autobiographical memory construction (Brewer, 1986; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). It is conceived of as part of working memory, consisting of a temporarily active set of available self-schemas. It has a hierarchy of goals that constrain cognition and behavior and serve as retrieval control processes. There is empirical evidence that self-relevance mobilizes long-term memory resources and results in the preferential episodic encoding of self-relevant material (e.g., Conway & Dewhurst, 1995). Active goals influence autobiographical retrieval (Moffitt & Singer, 1994), as evidenced by a relationship between memory content and personal strivings. Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) review studies that present neuroimaging evidence for the model, based on PET scans and slow cortical potential recordings during experiments with autobiographical recall. (Also see Conway, Pleydell-Pearce, & Whitecross, 2001; Conway et al., 1999; Craik et al., 1998.)

THE LIFE STORY
APPROACH TO PERSONALITY

If indeed the autobiographical memory system is guided, in part, by a self that consists of a hierarchy of desired goals, and these goals can be activated by internal processes

(e.g., thoughts, fantasies, etc.) or external cues (e.g., interpersonal or situational stimuli), how then do these goal hierarchies emerge, and what goals are likely to take precedence for individuals at a given period of their lives? We have explored this question in detail elsewhere (Singer & Blagov, in press), but briefly, we can suggest that the psychosocial stages of identity construction may play a critical role in how goals are aligned within the self hierarchy at various junctures of individuals' lives. As Erikson (1959) first proposed, individuals face a series of developmental crises, and their ongoing sense of identity emerges from the crucible of their various responses to these challenges of autonomy, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. More recently, McAdams (1988, 1993, 1996) has argued that this identity development takes the form of a life story, actively constructed by individuals in response to the contemporary world's lack of preconceived meaning systems. This life story organizes autobiographical memories (Brewer, 1996) and the goals and fantasies of the self (McAdams, 2001), situating individuals within a sociocultural milieu and integrating their various roles and relationships into an ongoing narrative (see also Bruner, 1997, for a similar position). According to McAdams (1995), a full scientific inquiry into personality requires analysis of the unique identity that is expressed in one's life story.

Aspects of the self match similar features of "good stories" because personality develops through a socialization process that is heavily based in the stories told to, about, and around children (Miller, 1994). In a sense, both our stories and our selves should have a plot structure organized around a desired ending or outcome; they should have a coherence that relates events to each other in an intelligible way; they should have identifiable protagonists, as well as obvious obstacles and nemeses; they should be credible in the sense that they contain elements that do not wildly contradict our understanding of what is plausible for a particular story or person (McAdams, 1996).

The comprehension and remembering of stories coincide with the development of children's ability to tell about their own past (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Stories become models for autobiographical remembering (Miller, 1994). A coherent life story begins to emerge in adolescence, when modern society expects individuals to make important life choices and to be able to justify them with a consistent and socially acceptable account of who they are, where they come from, and what they want to accomplish (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1996). In mid-adolescence, young people first become able to have a complex understanding of the biopsychosocial reasons behind the ordering of life events (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, 2001; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Coincidentally, memory studies have yielded a robust finding that vivid memories from early adulthood (about 20 years of age) are overrepresented in the reports of mature adults (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Holmes & Conway, 1999; Pillemer, 1998a, 1998b; Rubin, Rahhal, & Poon, 1998; Rubin, Wetzler, & Nebes, 1986). One explanation for this "reminiscence bump" is that it reflects the consolidation of identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001; Thorne, 2000).

McAdams (1996) believes that the organization of the life story can be predictive of mental health. The good adult life story is internally coherent; makes sense to others; has a richness of themes, characters, and events; and has increasing differentiation, generative integration, and a meaningful end. A mature adult identity with these characteristics enables the person to take on successfully different roles in work and relationships in order to be useful to the self and others while preserving integrity.

INTEGRATION OF THE
SELF-MEMORY SYSTEM AND
THE LIFE STORY NARRATIVE
WITH THE LIFE STORY SCHEMA

If the self in Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's autobiographical memory model is linked to a developmentally sensitive life story of identity, which highlights what goals will be most prominent in its hierarchy at any given time, how do specific memories connect to the goals and information contained within narrative identity? Bluck and Habermas (2000, 2001) offer a theoretical connection through their concept of the *life story schema*, which bridges cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions of personality. Life story schema theory proposes that individuals possess an understanding of how the normative life story is constructed within our culture. This normative structure draws on social cognitive conventions with regard to temporal order, dominant themes, causal attributions, and evaluative stances toward experiences. In a sense, the life story schema is our semantic knowledge structure and contains our abstracted understanding of what our or anyone else's life story should contain. The raw experiences of autobiographical memories are filtered through the life story schema, which in turn helps individuals to assign meaning and value, both to their memories and the goals associated with them. Thus, Bluck and Habermas (2000, 2001) see the life story schema as an interface between the highest-order autobiographical knowledge in Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's (2000) model and the life story narrative identity. It provides the rules and grammar that link the two.

Self-Defining Memories
in the Self-Memory System
and the Life Story

If we assume that individuals have an overarching life story schema that sets parameters on how goals and memories might be linked in the personality, this schema will also lead individuals to see certain memories as more developmentally critical and thematically central to their immediate life story and its exigencies. These memories are likely to be more highly relevant to current important goals within the self and to generate a consequent greater level of affective intensity. Since they are expressive of salient concerns or conflicts in individuals' overarching narrative identity (i.e., the life story), they have been described as *self-defining memories* (Singer & Salovey, 1993). A self-defining memory is a reminiscence that is "vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories, and related to an important unresolved theme or enduring concern in an individual's life" (Singer & Salovey, 1993, p. 13).

Repetitiveness indicates that the memories are related to the recurrent goals in the working self. Singer and Salovey (1993) wrote about the motivational aspect of repetitive memories that serve deliberately or inadvertently as reminders for established goals or important decisions. Although the instance of reminiscence is transient, the relative stability of the basic story lines of repetitive memories has been demonstrated empirically (e.g., Christianson & Safer, 1996; Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Thorne, Cutting, & Skaw, 1998). The affective intensity and vividness of self-defining memories are indirect indicators of the role these memories play in cognition and personality (Singer & Salovey, 1993).

A self-defining memory is likely to show linkage to similar memories based on shared emotions, types of events, participants, goals, outcomes, or lessons. From a cognitive perspective, this would mean complex cross-indexing of knowledge that pertains to different self-defining memories at the higher levels of the self-memory system

hierarchy. A similar notion exists in the precursor of narrative theories of personality, Tomkins's (1987) script theory, according to which a process called psychological magnification links memories of similar events, increases their significance to the self, and weaves schemas and scripts out of the memories that later become self-fulfilling aspects of the self.

The self-defining memory construct is similar to Pillemer's (1998a) concept of personal event memories in that self-defining memories are experienced subjectively as truthful representations of past events, may have the quality of reexperiencing the event, and yield a detailed narrative. However, self-defining memories are not restricted to happenings that took place at a specific date and time. In fact, the degree of specificity is one of their measurable properties. The self-defining memory construct is more demanding than the concept of personal event memories in relation to the vividness of the remembered events and, especially, their importance to the person's identity.

The ability to recognize the importance of the memories, to abstract meaning from them, and to integrate that meaning into a life story schema is a developmental achievement (Bluck & Habermas, 2001). The degree to which the self-defining memories of individuals clearly and explicitly reveal their connection to the self is another quantifiable property of the narrative process. As an additional refinement of the life story schema elaboration (Bluck & Habermas, 2001) of the self-memory system model (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), it is proposed that self-defining memories constitute the kind of self-memory system output that is integrated by the life story schema. The implication is that processing self-defining memories in working memory can result in changes in the indices of the life story schema and thus reorganize its temporal, thematic, or causal lines.

Measurable Aspects of Self-Defining Memories Including Integrative Meaning

Singer and Blagov (in press) proposed that the relationship of self-defining memories to personality could be examined reliably along dimensions of structure, meaning, and affect. Structure is operationalized as the degree of temporal specificity and the amount of imagistic detail of the memory (Singer & Moffitt, 1991-1992). The dimension of meaning captures memory categorization and integration, that is, the degree to which the narrative contains an elaboration on a theme or issue in the individual's life that goes beyond the particulars of the remembered event. Such elaborations can be considered lessons learned or evidence for psychological wisdom (see Pillemer, 1998a; Staudinger, 2001). The affective tone is measured by means of participants' ratings of how a memory makes them feel at the time of recall, and it has been previously linked to the nature of personal strivings (approach and avoidance) and their attainment and nonattainment (Moffitt & Singer, 1994).

Thorne and McLean (2001) have recently operationalized a fourth dimension of content through a narrative coding system. Their system includes categories such as personal threat and injury, relationship, achievement, and guilt and shame, among others. Due to space limitations, we will only discuss the first dimension of meaning; interested readers can learn about results related to the other three dimensions in Blagov and Singer (in press).

The dimension of meaning The cognitive process by which a tellable and conscious narrative about the past is created has been called narrative processing (Singer & Bluck, 2001) or reminiscence (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Staudinger, 2001). It is to be distinguished from autobiographical

reasoning (Singer & Bluck, 2001) or life reflection (Staudinger, 2001), which is the derivation of meaning (interpretations, evaluations, insights, explanations, and lessons) from memory and life narratives. Theorists (e.g., Robinson, 1986) have suggested that the creation of meaning in autobiographical memory functions in affect regulation and relationship maintenance and repair. Making meaning of past struggles and sharing it has been found to predict positive self-regard in college students (Debats, Drost, & Hansen, 1995), less grief over time in bereaved spouses (Bauer & Bonanno, 2001), and wellbeing, a sense of growth, and enhanced ego development in parents of disabled children (King, Scollon, Ramsey, & May, 2000).

In an attempt to operationalize this dimension, Pillemer (1998a) suggested that personal event memories could be classified into categories based on their implied meaning, for example, originating events, turning points, symbolic messages, and memorable messages. Drawing on Pillemer's reasoning, but unable to validate his typology empirically, Singer and Blagov (2000) offered the more general construct of *integrative memories:* narratives in which the individual ascribes meaning to the memories by relating them to lessons about the self, important relationships, or life in general. A pilot study suggested good reliability of an early version of an integration coding system and a relationship between young people's socialemotional adjustment and the degree to which they sought meaning in self-defining memories (Blagov & Singer, 2000). Based on these observations, Singer and Blagov (in press) suggested that the meaning-making process in the construction of self-defining memories enables autobiographical memory to affect the self. Not only do goals active in the self-memory system influence the construction of memories (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), but linking self-defining memories to abstract self-knowledge through

the integrative process creates a positive feedback loop that gives additional cognitive, affective, and motivational value to the memory and powerfully reinforces relevant goals in the self-memory system (Singer & Blagov, in press).

Summary of the Overall Conceptual Framework

The working self of healthy conscious adults has the ability to search autobiographical knowledge to inform and assist its efforts toward attainment of current goals active in working memory (Conway, 1996). The autobiographical knowledge base is searched first at the most general and abstract level and, as thematic categories relevant to the current goals are found, the search proceeds toward the specific levels, and details about specific experiences from the past may be activated. The phenomenal conscious experience of a memory is tightly linked to the narrative processing of the activated knowledge, which children have learned to engage in from their earliest years (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Miller, 1994). In adolescence, more sophisticated autobiographical reasoning becomes possible as memories are elaborated upon and deliberately used as sources of abstract knowledge and lessons (Bluck & Habermas, 2001; Staudinger, 2001; Thorne, 2000). Repetitive, vivid, and emotionally intense memories that are tied to the enduring concerns of the working self become likely candidates for autobiographical reasoning. The abstract knowledge from these self-defining memories becomes integrated with other semantic memories about the self and gives rise to the life story schema, which is a permanent but evolving index of lifetime periods and important themes and concerns (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). With age, the life story schema gains increasing importance with respect to its ability to influence the working

Figure 13.1   A model of the role of the life story schema and self-defining memories in the adult Self Memory System. Episodic memories subject to autobiographical processing become self-defining. They can yield abstracted information that may be integrated into the life story schema. For simplicity, all pathways through which the working self can access the autobiographical knowledge base and the feed-forward pathway from the life story schema to the working self have been omitted.

self as a source of motivation and wisdom (Staudinger, 1999). Figure 13.1 presents the framework visually.

The structure of self-defining memory narratives is their temporal organization and detail specificity (Singer & Moffitt, 1991-1992), and it depends on the extent to which the search through the autobiographical knowledge base has progressed to the most specific level. Overgeneral memories may indicate a working memory deficit due to emotional distress or depression (Williams, 1996). They may also be due to a motivated inhibitory process similar to repression (Singer & Salovey, 1993) or to an inability to put unusual and traumatic experiences into conventional story lines (Barclay, 1996).

The meaning of self-defining memories is their integrative quality, or the extent to which the narrative contains evidence for abstracted knowledge or lessons about the self or the world beyond the remembered events. Integrative self-defining memories indicate that individuals have engaged in autobiographical reasoning about the memory and are explicitly using their past experience to inform their sense of identity and depth of self-understanding.

The content of self-defining memories is their subject matter. It may indicate what kinds of events, interactions, and outcomes the individual is most motivated to attain or to avoid (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer & Salovey, 1993). It may also indicate what

kinds of actual events from the past were most important in determining the current personality status. Studying the intrapersonal trends and interpersonal differences in the proposed dimensions of self-defining memories bridges together the study of cognitive processes in autobiographical memory and the study of identity from a narrative perspective. It may also lead to insights about what constitutes a well-developed life story that promotes growth, maturity, adjustment, and wisdom.

In sum, the vivid narrative memories that clients generate in psychotherapy are located in a cognitive framework of personality that encompasses both a self-system and network of autobiographical memory. The glue that holds this framework together is the tendency of individuals to construct ongoing narratives or life stories of their identity, with memories and goals as their vital building blocks. The most important goal-relevant autobiographical memories may be operationalized as self-defining memories in the laboratory and subjected to systematic scrutiny for their relationship to other measures of personality and adjustment. The following section provides an example of this research.

VALIDATION OF THE SELF-DEFINING MEMORY FRAMEWORK: PERSONALITY ADJUSTMENT AND DEFENSES

To demonstrate the utility of this model of autobiographical memory and personality, it would be helpful to show that self-defining memories that contain integrative statements are indeed related to indices of ego development and social-emotional maturity. To test this question, we formulated the following proposition: Individuals with higher numbers of integrative statements in their self-defining memories should show evidence of higher

levels of personality adjustment and more sophisticated defensive strategies in coping with stress or emotion.

To measure personality adjustment, we employed the Short Form of the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI-SF) (Weinberger, 1997, 1998). For this chapter, we focus on the specific relationship of the dimension of meaning, as operationalized by integrative statements in the self-defining memories, to Weinberger's measure. The WAI-SF consists of 37 items that yield scores on two dimensions, self-restraint and subjective experience of distress. Self-restraint covers intrapersonal (impulse control), interpersonal (suppression of aggression and consideration of others), and communal (responsibility) aspects of socialization. Low levels of self-restraint are characteristic of young children or individuals who do not regulate their impulses and affects successfully. High levels reflect strong socialization and attention to social convention; however, individuals who are best socially-emotionally adapted should have moderate self-restraint as they manage affect skillfully and do not resort to overcontrol (Asendorpf & van Aken, 1999; Hart, Hofmann, Edelstein, & Keller, 1997; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). Distress has the subdimensions of trait anxiety, depression, low well-being, and low self-esteem. Subjective distress on the WAI-SF correlates with personality measures of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem (Weinberger, 1998).

We hypothesized a curvilinear relationship between integrative statements in self-defining memories and individuals' levels of self-restraint, such that individuals with moderate levels of self-restraint would show the highest level of integration in the self-defining memories, followed by high self-restraint and then low self-restraint. To test the proposed relationship between integrative self-defining memories and self-restraint, 106 student participants received the Self-Defining Memory Task (Singer & Moffitt,

1991-1992) and generated 10 self-defining memories. The Self-Defining Memory Task requests that participants write down memories that are vivid, emotionally intense, repetitive, familiar to the self, and linked to other similar memories. Participants rate memories collected with this method as more important, and they are judged by raters to be more concerned with themes of self-discovery than memories that are collected with more general autobiographical memory requests (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer & Moffitt, 1991-1992). The current version contained a request for the memory to be relevant to an enduring theme, issue, or conflict in the person's life.

The Classification System and Scoring Manual for Self-Defining Autobiographical Memories by Singer and Blagov (2000) is an original protocol that allows raters to be trained to score self-defining memories for structure and meaning. This system has been validated over a series of studies (Blagov & Singer, 2000, in press; Blagov, Singer, & Vergnani, 2002; Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer & Blagov, 2000; Singer & Moffitt, 1991-1992; Singer & Salovey, 1993). The scoring system (Singer & Blagov, 2000) discriminates between integrative and nonintegrative self-defining memories, based on a coding of statements made in the written memories. Integrative statements include the following kinds of phrases, "I learned that . . . ," "This experience taught me that . . . ," "Since then, I understood that . . . ," and so on.

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistic with three levels of self-restraint (low, moderate, and high) as the predictor and the number of integrative memories (out of 10 memories for each individual) as the dependent variable. The statistic was significant, $F(2, 96) = 6.14$, $p < .01$, and an inspection of the means plotted in Figure 13.2 reveals the predicted curvilinear relationship. The effect of self-restraint was explored further with Tukey's HSD post-hoc

tests. They revealed a significant difference in integrative memories between the low ($M = 1.91$) and the moderate ($M = 4.18$) self-restraint groups ($p < .05$) and between the high ($M = 2.74$) and the moderate groups ($p < .10$). These results suggest that moderately restrained individuals wrote down the highest numbers of integrative self-defining memories.

In Weinberger's (1998) framework, self-restraint is a developmental achievement and a sign of emotional maturity. From a narrative perspective, maturity is synonymous with the ability to engage in autobiographical reasoning to construct a coherent and generative life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001; Staudinger, 1999, 2001; Thorne, 2000). Individuals with moderate self-restraint scores did indeed write down more integrative self-defining memories than did the low and the high self-restraint groups.

Although the causal relationships remain unclear, we favor the following interpretation. Meaning-making and the construction of integrative self-defining memories are strategies that help people cope with negative emotions. Being more impulsive and less socialized into cultural narrative norms, low-restraint individuals rarely step back to think about the meaning of their actions and memories. Moderate self-restraint suggests an ability to acknowledge and regulate emotions, making it possible for these individuals to engage in high-order processing of their emotional memories. High self-restraint is associated with a desire to conform to cultural norms and narrative constraints, as well as a rigid and overcontrolled coping style. However, high-restraint individuals did show more integrative memories than low-restraint individuals. This finding makes sense if we assume that at least some portion of high self-restraint individuals rely on intellectualization as a defensive strategy. Future research would want to differentiate types of integrative
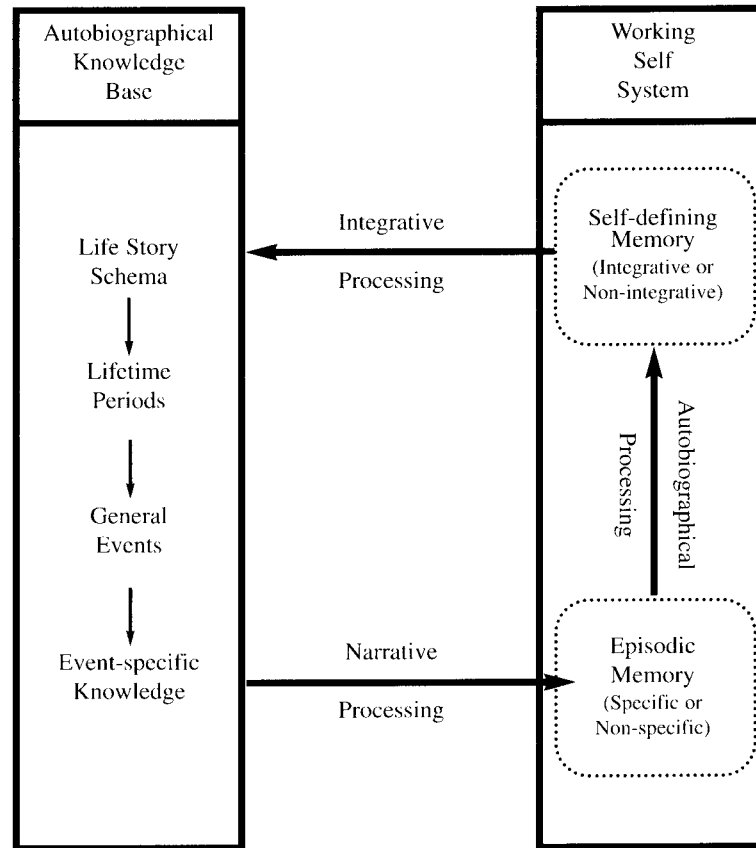
Figure 13.2   Moderate self-restraint on the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (an indication of emotional maturity) predicts higher numbers of integrative self-defining memories in young adults.

statements in memories; perhaps some types of integrative statements are more linked to other positive aspects of memory recall, such as specificity or affective intensity.

Overall, the findings of this study do indeed suggest that our framework of self-defining memories may be meaningfully related to personality adjustment. Having demonstrated the validity of this linkage of memory and personality in the laboratory, the last section of this chapter returns to the realm of therapy and illustrates how we might apply this same conceptual framework to the narrative memories our clients share in psychotherapy.

APPLICATION OF SELF-DEFINING MEMORY RESEARCH TO CLINICAL PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY

As part of a standard evaluation process, the first author of this chapter routinely asks clients in their initial meetings to share a specific memory or two from their lives that they consider particularly important and self-revealing. At later junctures in the course of therapy, clients invariably share other memories that capture a theme or conflict that has emerged as significant in the therapeutic work. Whether the clients provide memories initially or they surface later on, the amount

of emotion and meaning attached to them makes them stand out as prominent episodes in their life stories. Once these memories emerge in the therapy, it is not uncommon that links between them and other memories similar in both plot and sequence of emotions are likely to become apparent (see Tomkins, 1979). Clients also tend to return to these memories at moments when they seek to explain past motives and relationships. To determine how central and self-defining a given memory might be, one can gauge how many self-defining memory attributes are present: that is, vividness, affective intensity, repetitiveness, linkage to other memories, and focus on an enduring concern or unresolved conflict.

If indeed a memory seems to be serving in a self-defining capacity, the therapist can also actively introduce exploration of these particular memories into the therapy process. By examining the meanings and patterns that emerge from the memory, clients may gain insight into certain recurring themes from their lives that appear to dominate interpersonal interactions, including the therapeutic relationship. In fact, the ability of clients to see a connection between a self-defining memory and the manner in which they are interacting with the therapist vivifies their intellectual understanding that past concerns can resurface and affect current relationships.

Once therapist and client have identified and explored a set of related self-defining memories, the images from these memories serve as metaphoric touchstones in the therapeutic dialogue. The use of the self-defining memory as a metaphor in both the therapeutic relationship and ongoing relationships outside the therapy encourages the client to draw lessons or inferences from these linked experiences. As the client articulates and applies these integrative messages, greater self-restraint and better personality adjustment would be expected to emerge. In the following case example, we elaborate these

ideas about the value of self-defining memories in psychotherapy and show in more detail how one makes use of these memories in treatment.

Art is a skilled tradesman in his mid-40s who is married with three children. He entered therapy because his wife was threatening to dissolve their 18-year marriage due to their emotional distance and conflicts over sexual intimacy. Through her own therapy, she had gained the confidence to confront his controlling and passive-aggressive behavior toward her. In particular, she claimed that whenever they would draw close and become physically intimate with each other, he would withdraw the next day, pick fights with her, or become thoroughly preoccupied with his work. At other times, he would literally become physically sick the day after they had been intimate. In their actual love making, she felt that he would purposely climax before her to deprive her of physical pleasure. Their relationship had reached such an impasse that they had not made love in the previous 5 months. One of the major sources of contention was his sleep apnea, which led him to snore and twitch at night. The severity of this condition caused them to sleep in separate beds. His wife felt that he had not made a sincere effort to remedy this problem and in fact used it as a way to distance himself from her.

In addition to describing his current difficulties in this first meeting, Art provided some basic background about his family life. He was the middle child of a large family and neither parent displayed much warmth or affection to the children. His father was often away on business and drank a great deal when he was home. He tended to be opinionated and highly critical of his wife and children. Due to this negative atmosphere, Art would often withdraw into silence or just disappear for hikes in the woods. When asked for an important memory, he provided the following one:

As [far back] as I can remember, I had worked to save money for college. I wanted to go to forestry school. I worked as a paperboy, a bus boy, and pumped gas. Every spare moment when I wasn't in school or studying, I was working. I did the papers in the morning and the other jobs at night after school. And I never spent a penny. I just put it into the bank and saved and saved. Well, the summer before my senior year of high school I got a chance to go with a school group to Europe for a few weeks. When I came back from the trip, I went to check my account. The money was gone. I went to my parents and asked them, "What was going on? Where was my money?" My father said he had taken the money to buy a car and when I graduated high school I could have the car. All the money for tuition was gone. I never went to college, even though I was accepted to a forestry school. And you know what, every child after me went to college and my parents paid for their full ride.

When asked what this memory meant to him, Art talked about how he felt that even people who were supposed to love or protect him could easily betray him. He said that he put up a powerful wall around his feelings and when he felt threatened, he retreated behind it by becoming silent and aloof. In subsequent sessions, Art continued to look at multiple examples of this pattern of withdrawal and his heightened sensitivity to possible betrayal by loved ones.

During our fifth meeting, he described a recent incident that linked to his earlier memory. He had recently finished a wall at a construction site when one of his coworkers heard the sound of kittens' meowing. Despite the knowledge that he would have to destroy the wall he had just built, he smashed it down to save the kittens. As he broke the wall, the irony entered his mind that he was able to do this for these animals, but that he was somehow unwilling to break through his protective front to save his marriage.

In the ninth meeting, he described how therapy had brought his wife and him closer and that they had made love, but how he grew distant the next day and became physically sick. He talked about how uncomfortable he was with praise and how he never received positive feedback growing up. He then suddenly returned to the self-defining memory that he had recalled in the first session. He said that the only thing his father had ever praised him for was saving money, but in the end he took all his money away. He realized too that he associated needing someone's approval or love with a loss of control. This loss of control terrified him and also enraged him. He connected his giving up any plan to go to college, and a subsequent period of heavy drinking and drug use after high school, with a desire to lash out at his parents. He recalled an earlier episode of running away from home when he was 14 and needing to spend time with a Youth Services officer. He linked all of these experiences to a general feeling of being betrayed and rejected by his parents. His withdrawal from his wife after increased intimacy was not just a gesture of fear, but also an attack by someone who felt wounded and cornered.

In a meeting several weeks later, Art recalled a self-defining memory about the weekend of his first sexual experience. He was still a teenager and was dating an older woman in her 20s. She was much more experienced than him and took him to a vacation house to lose his virginity. On the car ride home, she revealed to him that she had "deflowered" him in order to take out her anger for being raped as a teenager. He described himself as devastated by this revelation and noted that, true to his subsequent pattern, he became physically sick.

In a session a few months later, he revealed yet another self-defining memory that connected to the same pattern of trust and humiliation. He recalled a time in elementary school when his teacher noticed his

dirty fingernails from the playground and forced him to stand in front of the class and show his hands to his classmates. When asked about the connection to his other memories, he explained that yet another figure of supposed trust and protection (in this case, a teacher) had betrayed him.

Connected to this series of memories was Art's revelation that he often became aroused when his wife was most upset and vulnerable. He later linked this admission to the fact that he felt attracted to pornography after periods of conflict and anger with his wife. He saw these responses as ways in which he could express a sense of anger and control after periods in which he himself had been made to feel vulnerable and emotionally open.

As these disclosures and insights accumulated over this first year of therapy, Art made significant progress with his wife. They were making love more regularly, but the pattern of connection and then distance was still quite apparent. This "push-me-pull-you" dynamic had also clearly become a part of the transference relationship. Art expressed a great deal of good feeling toward the therapy and attended faithfully, but he could be counted on to follow a positive session with the news that things had gone backward or were "up and down." Similarly, he might report that he forgot to try a recommendation from the therapy or that it had not worked or only worked for a while.

We were able to identify this pattern of transference behavior and connect it to his sequence of intimacy and withdrawal, as exemplified in his series of self-defining memories. We talked about how it was more effective for him to express his hurt or anger to me directly and then work through these feelings in our dialogue. With his pattern enacted in the therapeutic relationship, it could be felt and not just discussed abstractly. Interpretation of this dynamic and its clear linkage to his memories made a

tremendous difference for Art. He was able to take a step forward in his commitment to his treatment and, simultaneously, his marriage. For the first time in therapy, he was able to say how grateful he was for our meetings and how much it mattered to him to come to his sessions.

As this experience of empathy and connection deepened in the therapy, he was able to recall more painful memories of his upbringing and his relationship to his father. He recalled one of the only times that his father had shown affection to him and embraced him. He was in his bed one morning and his father came into his room to wake him. Seeing the room in disarray, his father flung a dresser drawer across the room at the exact moment that Art sat up in bed. The drawer hit Art in the head and almost knocked him cold. As Art cried in pain, his father crossed the room and held him to try to soothe him. In telling this story, Art's mixture of anger and sorrow was palpable, but he still blocked himself from allowing any tears to fall. Although he struggled for control, he was able to recognize his urge to distance himself from me and to diminish the therapy. With the insight he had gained from understanding the patterns in his memories and seeing it enacted in the transference, he stopped himself from withdrawing, despite the strong impulse to do so.

These periods of strong emotional revelation and accompanying insight allowed Art to make continued connections between his self-defining memories and the messages that they offered to him about his pattern of behavior in relationships. He increasingly made reference to "the paper route" memory, linking it to his "first sexual experience" memory and other memories that spoke to his fear of betrayal in intimacy and defenses against it. With his self-understanding growing and his determination to express rather than act out his fear, his marital relations improved to a point where we could cut back

on his weekly therapy with the confidence that he could work through the rough passages in his marriage on his own.

To end this case history and its account of how clients can learn about and make use of the thematic meanings of their self-defining memories, we can give one final example of Art's growing self-understanding. In one of his last meetings, he started the therapy by saying he had another "paper route" example that recently happened with his 3-year-old daughter. As they were leaving a store, she announced that she had her own quarters to put in the bubble gum machine. When he inspected the quarters, he realized that they were vintage silver quarters from his boyhood coin collection that he had given to his children as a present. As he felt himself becoming angry, he suddenly recalled an episode from his childhood when his brother had done the exact same thing with his penny collection, using a 1909 penny to purchase gum.

Art came to therapy that day able to make a connection between his memories and to offer his interpretation of how they were linked. His capacity for integration of his remembered experiences (seeing these memories as special cases of his "paper route" self-defining memory) indicated a deepening self-understanding and an emerging sense of freedom from the rigid patterns of his past. Rather than lashing out at his daughter, he was able to see what had provoked his initial feeling and then put this reaction in perspective. His present experience no longer automatically replicated his past.

Art's use of his self-defining memories in his psychotherapy can be expressed more formally in the conceptual model of autobiographical memory and personality that we have advanced in this chapter (see Figure 13.1). Art began with a particular abstraction or life story schema: "My life is a story of how intimacy can't be trusted and is likely to lead to betrayal. My only protection is to withdraw or control others."

From this schema, we can trace the linkage of overarching goals ("to avoid emotional pain" and "to control others who might hurt you") in the working self to autobiographical knowledge in the self-memory system. A developmental crisis precipitated by his wife's demand for intimacy then causes his search through the autobiographical knowledge system to give particular salience and affective intensity to certain lifetime periods ("childhood years raising money"), to general events ("times my parents betrayed me"), and to specific events ("the paper route" memory and other linked specific events). These specific events are organized through narrative processing into episodic memories, which in turn, due to their relevance to the pressing active goals of his working self, take on the special features of self-defining memories.

These memories appear as vivid, affectively intense, repetitive, dense in their connections to other memories, and expressive of an unresolved and ongoing conflict about intimacy. As he recalls them, they provide information both about the emotion associated with similar experiences and the relative possibility of attaining his goals (e.g., in this case, only by withdrawing from intimacy might he minimize his pain).

Finally, the process of psychotherapy allows him to step back from these self-defining memories and apply integrative processing to his understanding of them. Through analysis and interpretation of the memories, he is able to link the memories to a new goal ("Overcoming my fear of intimacy in order to save my marriage"), and this reconfiguration of the self-memory system requires the application of new understanding or reframing of the self-defining memories. As he attaches this new integrative message to his self-defining memories ("My withdrawal may have worked then, but does not work now"), reverberations occur throughout the self-system all the way up to a shift in the life

story schema ("My life story is one in which I cautiously and slowly learn to accept love, despite my earlier history of distrust and betrayal"). This modification of the life story schema completes the complex loop and suggests a satisfactory response to the developmental challenge that had been raised at this juncture in his life story, that is, he succeeded in building greater intimacy in his marriage.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we outlined a conceptual model for understanding the role of self-defining memories in personality, as well as their potential application in psychotherapy. We provided a theoretical bridge between Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's cognitive model of autobiographical memory and McAdams's life story of identity. We suggested that Bluck and Habermas's concept of a life story schema offers an overarching organization for linking memory and personality and that self-defining memories are concrete expressions of how this linkage manifests itself in consciousness. Furthermore, we have introduced the idea of integrative statements associated with self-defining memories as a means of measuring the personality adjustment or socioemotional maturity of individuals. To support this proposal, we provided data from our laboratory and also a case study from psychotherapy practice.

In future work, it would be important to develop more formal assessment procedures for identifying clients' salient goals, related self-defining memories, and progress in expression of integrative statements. One possibility would be to incorporate the following instruments into the initial evaluation of clients: Emmons's (1986) Personal Striving measure, the Self-Defining Memory Task (Singer & Moffitt, 1991-1992), and our scoring system for measuring integrative statements in self-defining memories (Singer &

Blagov, 2000). Linkage of these measures taken at the beginning, middle, and end of therapy to indices of therapeutic outcome would provide validation of this model's treatment efficacy.

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